



Focus

Miscellaneous Revisions (ammonia criteria, regulation of dams, tools, and minor edits)

The Washington Department of Ecology is proposing to revise several key aspects of the state's surface water quality standards. This focus sheet provides a summary of miscellaneous revisions being proposed (No. 8 of 8).

Revisions to ammonia criteria

In 1999 the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommended new chronic and acute fresh water criteria for ammonia exposure that are different from Washington's existing criteria. The new criteria are less stringent than the existing criteria, and an evaluation of the data suggested that salmon might not be fully protected by the chronic exposure criteria.

Ecology reviewed both the EPA criteria document and the published literature on effects of ammonia to early life-stage salmonids to determine whether adopting the less-stringent criteria would still ensure protection of salmonids in Washington. Based on this review, Ecology proposes to keep the existing chronic criterion for waters used by salmonids and to apply the new EPA-recommended chronic criteria to other fresh waters. New EPA-recommended acute criteria would be applied to all fresh waters.

Revisions to address the regulation of dams

Ecology is proposing language to address regulation of total dissolved gas affected by dams, to clarify special conditions that apply to the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Ecology is also proposing to add a new subsection to the implementation section of the rule, providing specific language on expectations of dams for meeting water quality standards and the use of a compliance schedule for that purpose.

New language will clarify that a compliance schedule can be used to issue water quality certifications for re-licensing existing dams. In the compliance schedule, dams need to endeavor to meet standards. If standards cannot be met, dams may pursue a site-specific standard or use-attainability analysis (UAA).

Ecology is also proposing language recognizing that human structural changes that cannot be effectively remedied (such as some dams) may represent the best condition achievable for that water body. The proposed language states that, when a water body does not meet its assigned criteria due to natural conditions or due to human structural changes that cannot be effectively remedied (as defined by federal regulations), then the best attainable water quality conditions may become an alternative target for that water body.

Tools for applying criteria

A new section has been added to the rule identifying and providing more detail on tools that can be used for applying criteria and uses. These include:

- site-specific criteria;
- variances;
- use-attainability analysis (UAA); and
- water quality offsets.

What else is important for me to know?

Minor clarification and typographic edits have been made throughout the document where the rule language was previously unclear or ambiguous. Changes have also been made to the rule language and organization to make the water quality standards more user-friendly and readable.

How do I learn more?

To learn more about the miscellaneous changes being proposed, contact Susan Braley at (360) 407-6414 or visit our web site at www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/swqs. To obtain copies of focus sheets or discussion documents, or to be added to the mailing list, contact Andrew Kolosseus at (360) 407-7543. To receive electronic updates on the water quality standards revisions, send an e-mail message to swqs@ecy.wa.gov, with “Subscribe” as the subject heading.

If you have special accommodation needs, contact Ann Butler at (360) 407-6480. The TTY number is 711 or 1-800-833-6388.